

# **J.H. SHORTHOUSE**

**Anglo-Catholic Novelist**



**by**

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Gladstone was enthusiastic about it, and was seen in a photograph with the second volume on his knee – 'the title of the book is quite plain'. Archbishop Trench thought that it was 'written in rarely good English'. The royal Duke of Connaught was seen in Egypt 'lying on his back' and reading it. It was regarded as a strong defence for the High Anglican position, and engaged many pious readers over three generations. The book in question was *John Inglesant*, a historical novel by Joseph Henry Shorthouse.

The story of Shorthouse and his writings may illuminate the current movement towards a less simplistic understanding of Victorian religion. The challenges faced by serious Anglicans in the nineteenth century have engaged much research interest, but there is still work to be done on the tensions within Anglo-Catholicism and the gradations of approval for all that followed the end of the Oxford Movement proper in 1845. There had been little mobility between the denominations in the earlier part of the century, until the questions which the Tractarians asked about their Church brought a variety of individual answers and reactions. Some were strengthened by a more disciplined application of old High Church principles cherished in family tradition; others were lifted from tepid conformism to a deeper commitment to their faith; some were led to believe that true authority lay only in Roman Catholicism; others found themselves driven from questioning to doubt and from doubt to denial. The movement from Protestant nonconformity to Anglicanism

was less common. The challenge to decide where ecclesiastical authority lay could be disturbing to Anglicans but was unlikely to trouble those who dissented from the principle that apostolic succession was a requisite of valid sacraments. The rarity of such conversions gives particular interest to the career of J. H. Shorthouse.

That Shorthouse should often have been regarded as belonging to the newer Anglo-Catholic movement which developed under Pusey's leadership, is a tribute to what that movement produced in disciplining and beautifying devotional life. Is it an accurate judgement? He was not drawn by the aesthetic appeal of ceremony or the Catholic social conscience which was making itself felt in many hitherto neglected parishes. It is certain, however, that his personal change and his major literary work owe their being to the Oxford Movement. The rediscoveries and fresh emphases of the Tractarian years brought to the Church of England a revival which can certainly be called Anglo-Catholic but was not always associated with ritualism.

The career of Shorthouse reveals much about the Church and also about the Victorian age. Its pressures and changes, its opportunities for the individual to make more choices about the direction of his life, are reflected in the course that took him to unexpected fame. On a superficial view which would isolate aspects of Victorianism into labelled compartments, his story is improbable. There was no apparent likelihood that a Quaker manufacturer of vitriol, born and still living in Birmingham, should become

an apologist for a highly sacramental type of Anglicanism, or that he should help to increase the growing interest in the seventeenth-century Church. Yet he firmly held this position, combined with the snobbery, the fear of socialism and the intolerant dismissal of new ideas which the period can also show abundantly. It is all as improbable and as contradictory as the Oxford Movement itself.

To see Shorthouse as a former Quaker is as important as to understand the early Evangelicalism of Newman and of Henry and Robert Wilberforce. The revival in the Church of England was able to give him what was lacking in his first faith: a deep sacramental sense without rigid conformity or insistence on details of developed dogma. The year of his birth, 1834, was the year when the Tracts were beginning to make their influence felt. It was also a time when the Quaker community was sharing with other sections of society the tensions of a new age. The distinctive marks of drab clothing, 'plain speech' and separatism were proving less attractive to the new generation. More serious still was the 'Beacon Controversy', which led some of the Evangelical Quakers to deny the primitive belief in the inward light and to seek membership of groups like the Plymouth Brethren. Shorthouse himself was born into a traditionally conservative Quaker family.<sup>1</sup> His great-grandfather had founded the chemical works which he himself was eventually to inherit. The more influential of his grandmothers was violently against the Church of England and proud in her memory of hearing Wesley preach.

Apart from the literary reputation which he gained, his life was uneventful. He travelled seldom, and usually in his parents' company. He never visited Italy, about which he wrote so convincingly in *John Inglesant*, and he gained most of his impressions of it by listening to his father talking about it while shaving. He did not go to Little Gidding which also has an important place in the book. Little is recorded about the process which led him to the Church of England: there is none of the agonized self-revelation which had characterized secessions to Rome, for his change was socially less alarming and the period was slowly becoming more tolerant of individual choice. He and his wife started going to Church and found it congenial; they were baptized together in 1861. After his death his wife wrote: 'More and more my husband felt he could be truly happy only as a baptized member of the Church of England'.

Some light is thrown on his motives by a letter which he wrote to an unnamed correspondent, a Quaker who was distressed at his secession.<sup>2</sup> He could not help himself, he said; there was overwhelming need to join 'that plan and system of religion which I cannot doubt God has appointed for the world'. The Quaker doctrine of the indwelling of the Word was a great truth, but only a partial one. The Church of England possessed totally what Quakers and other 'so-called Evangelical Christians' had in limitation. The Church had the sacraments and organization needed for the true practice of Christianity in this world - 'all that which brings

men as men absolutely into communion with God'. Primitive Quakerism had died down into a mere sect while the Church of England stood firm as the national Church. True, the visible Church is sadly divided, but the furtherance of unity requires that a man shall attach himself to an outward and visible body of believers.

Shorthouse continues with a passage which foreshadows his later excursions into fiction. The immanence of God, the sacramental reference of all experienced phenomena, the deep regard for the Anglican liturgy - all these are contained in *John Inglesant* and in his later novels. His feeling for them goes far to explain his conversion:

We live in a constitution ordained by God which includes all visible things, and everything on earth, belonging to the original creation, both of the world and humanity, is divine and belonging to God. The Prayer-book in this country is the only human ordinance (if it can be called a human ordinance, being nothing but the religion of the Bible arranged as a manual for daily use) that acknowledges this.

This then is the spirit, and the zeal, which went into the making of *John Inglesant*. Shorthouse started work on the novel in 1866 and continued on and off for ten years, once leaving it aside altogether for nearly two years. Even when it was finished, it remained another four years in manuscript before being privately printed (by a Quaker printer) at the author's expense. It was distributed mostly to



his own friends, but a few copies got as far as the reviewers; there were some local notices, and one in the High Church *Guardian*. Shorthouse was encouraged to send it to the venerable firm of Smith Elder, where it was brusquely rejected on the advice of their reader, the popular novelist James Payn that it was 'not the sort of book which it suited them to print'.<sup>3</sup> Then Mrs Humphry Ward – an improbable midwife for an Anglican novel – gave a copy to Alexander Macmillan. Moved perhaps by the Platonism in which both he and the author were interested, Macmillan decided on publication.

The appearance of *John Inglesant* under that famous imprint in 1881 attracted a good deal of critical attention. Even the sceptical *Westminster Review* found space for a brief and mainly favourable notice, although it was not prepared to give the author exalted ideas of his quality:

Those who expect a historical novel of the brilliantly dramatic kind, which Sir Walter Scott made classic, and which Alexandre Dumas made so delightful, will be disappointed.<sup>4</sup>

The *Saturday Review*, noted for its acerbity in dealing with new books, was both kind and perceptive. Recognizing that Shorthouse had made an important contribution to Anglican fiction, the reviewer noticed a basic weakness in the failure to give fully convincing reasons for the hero's return from Roman to Anglican obedience:

Inglesant's final declaration in favour of the Church of his birth takes us by surprise instead of developing itself naturally out of his past history, so that we are tempted to quarrel with the last page of the book as inconsistent and out of place, when taken by themselves [sic] they contain one of the most attractive descriptions ever written of the Church of England.<sup>5</sup> It was the High Anglican tone of the book which won most of its admirers. The critic in the *Spectator* found deeper meaning in the story: 'it mirrors the subtle complexity with which, in actual experience, the proportions of the moral life are blended with the unmoral'.<sup>6</sup> He contrasted Shorthouse's subtlety with the straightforward and uncomplicated morality of Charles Kingsley who, if he had used the story, would have 'had the hero undergo severe punishment for his loyal perjury'. The puzzlement which was to overtake many readers of *John Inglesant* in later years was manifested in another favourable review in *Blackwood's*, whose critic could detect the fact that Shorthouse was not destined to produce anything so important again:

The book altogether is one of the most remarkable that has been written for a long time [...] We can scarcely guess what is the attitude, any more than what is the purpose of the author, or whether he will have anything more to say to the public, or has written his heart out in this large and singular utterance.<sup>7</sup>

Certainly nothing else that Shorthouse wrote later either gained or deserved the fame of *John Inglesant*. The plot, which is long and complex, can be summarized in its essentials. John Inglesant, child of a family which has kept Roman Catholic sympathies during the turmoil of the sixteenth century, is brought up under Jesuit influence and precipitated into the Civil War on the Royalist side. He undertakes missions for the King which bring him to trial and almost to execution when he falls into Parliamentary hands, and is repudiated by his royal master. After his release he is briefly reunited with his twin brother, just back from a long sojourn abroad and soon to be killed by an Italian villain called Malvolti.

After the murder, Inglesant goes to France where he is tested by the demands of the active and contemplative lives and has his last meeting with Mary Collet whom he had come to love when he visited the Anglican community at Little Gidding. He goes on to Italy, in the service of the Jesuits but bent on revenge for his brother's death. He attends the conclave which elects a new Pope and is then so successful in an errand for his superiors that he is rewarded with a fief and marries an Italian girl. He meets Malvolti but finds himself unable to kill him in cold blood. The episode when Inglesant dedicates his sword in a country church was based on one that Shorthouse found in 'a very old book' and of which he said:

I am quite justified in saying that *John Inglesant* was written to lead up expressly to this one incident, and I do not think it would have been written if I had not chanced upon this beautiful story.<sup>8</sup>

This comment is important: the purpose of the novel is to show Christian forgiveness, as well as presenting the Catholic claims of the Church of England.

Later Inglesant sets off to plague-stricken Naples in search of his wife's brother. There he meets Malvolti again, now blind and the devoted member of a religious order that tends the sick. He returns to find his wife dead, goes to Rome where he is involved in the revival and suppression of the Molinists, and is for a time imprisoned. At last he returns to England, to a quiet life and membership of the Anglican Church. In the course of his long pilgrimage he has also incidentally encountered such seventeenth-century worthies as Milton, Cromwell, Hobbes and van Helmont.

The overcrowded plot reflects the preoccupations of a man living in a complex age and himself suffering from the tensions of changed religious allegiance. He chose to write about a time when the Church of England had not gained the complacent security of eighteenth-century conformism, a time when she was challenged by Roman claims and Protestant dissent, when the power of scepticism was seeming to grow to dangerous proportions. Shorthouse of course was not the first to find parallels here with his own time. The Tractarians had drawn strength and support from the Caroline divines and sacred poets, and idealised the

Laudian Church. Their *Library of Anglo-Catholic Theology* claimed by its title more than could justifiably be found in some of its chosen writers. Yet they had done a good service in reviving works which had helped to shape Anglican thought in its formative years. Shorthouse was drawn towards the Anglican revival of the recent past rather than its contemporary development.

He was attracted to the age and its characters by the nature of the Laudian church, but also for personal reasons. Molinos the Quietist had an appeal for the former Quaker who was now seeing the Inner Light as only part of a wider and more sacramental system of religion. He wrote. "Throughout the whole course of history few figures seem to me more calm, gracious, and beneficent than that of this Spanish priest".<sup>9</sup> His love of tradition and dignity went back before his change of allegiance and did not leave him in later life. In a later novel he wrote that he was convinced that anyone who entered an old church must surely feel 'a sense of the oneness of holy, if vague emotion, with that instinctive and unpremeditated art which is the mere result and reflex of ages of human life'.<sup>10</sup> This was not something he had newly found in the Church of England; rather it had helped to bring him to the Church. As a young Quaker he had written of his reflections in an old country church:

I thought how different a seat there must have been, with that old Crusader beside you, from two hours in the Meeting-House in Bull Street.

The seventeenth century is seen as the great religious age in an essay titled *Vestigia*:

The seventeenth century may be said to be the key of the nineteenth; and, in more things than many would believe, our thoughts and actions and disputes are but a repetition of the thoughts and actions and disputes of two hundred years ago.<sup>11</sup>

This conviction led him to join the Church of England, and to write his first novel. The appeal to basic continuity of faith and order despite changes of fortune and government was a fundamental appeal for loyal Anglicans in the face of secular attack. The holiness and learning of the Caroline Church was a two-edged sword; it could be wielded against Erastians who saw the Church as a department of the State and against Romanists who charged Anglicans with not showing the marks of catholicity. In the early days of the Oxford Movement, and throughout the lives of those first leaders who survived and remained Anglicans, the names often heard were Laud, Taylor, Cosin, Sparrow, Thorndike and Forbes.

What was the effect on Shorthouse, starting his novel over twenty years after Newman's secession and nearly thirty after the publication of Froude's *Remains*? There is evidence which might suggest that he had taken Froude's path from the Caroline to the medieval Church. After the passage from *Vestigia* quoted above, he goes on to praise 'the life of true romance [. . .] the life, that is, of everything



that is noble and disinterested as opposed to all that is sordid and mean'. But where is this life to be found?

The seventeenth century, though possessing it very much more than the nineteenth century does, certainly possessed it very much less than the fourteenth; and yet most persons, and I among them, would consider the seventeenth century infinitely nobler than the fourteenth. Again, there is no doubt that, as we possess it much less than the seventeenth century did, so there are not wanting thinkers who maintain (as I think mistakenly but who still maintain) that our century is a nobler one than the seventeenth.

This involved and somewhat muddled comparison of the possession of the 'noble and disinterested', which yet may not be the mark of a nobler age, was one in which even the author recognised the difficulty. What it shows principally is that he, like many of his contemporaries, liked to find in the past sticks with which to beat the present. The Romantic love of medievalism touched him as it had some of the Tractarians, as well as Morris and Tennyson, Carlyle and Ruskin, despite all the differences between them. However, what Shorthouse felt for the Middle Ages has to be seen not as a deep commitment but as part of his general regard for the old days. Most of it appears in the romantic stories and essays which he wrote when a Quaker, such as *Chivalry* and *An Essay which is no Essay*. In his novels, written as an Anglican, he takes the world of the seventeenth century, or of the eighteenth, or of his own day.

Shorthouse's handled his material with the skill not of a great but of a competent novelist. He has the gift of most Victorian writers of fiction for narrative and exciting incident. Like Newman, Wiseman, Kingsley and Neale, who turned to the early Church for their apologetic subjects, he can draw the reader out of the main theme into an episode of adventure and then back again. If one comes to the book as a reader not too proud and sophisticated to enjoy the kind of thing which Conan Doyle and Rider Haggard were doing towards the end of the century, there can be delight in the siege of Chester, the carnival in Florence, the conclave, the trial and condemnation of Molinos. Shorthouse can bring up in all its liveliness the spirit of the time. He loved the seventeenth century and tried to make himself familiar with its details; more particularly, he wanted to evoke for his own age its true spirit:

When, many years ago, I began the book, my principal, perhaps sole object was to endeavour for my own pleasure to realize, if possible, something of the exquisite age-spirit which combined all the finest feelings of our nature, and all the sympathies of our existence, with a certain picturesqueness of tone and result, which seems to me to mark the seventeenth century. That was my first idea. The philosophy and the story developed itself as I went on, but I should have considered myself amply rewarded if I could have succeeded in catching anything of this spirit.<sup>12</sup>



Whatever he found attractive in the past, there is no doubt of his intense devotion to the Church of England as he found it. Both in fiction and in biographical records, it is clear that he loved his new communion and felt no desire for further change. The stability of his faith after 1861, despite the tensions which left their mark on him, proves that his decision was not based on aesthetic grounds alone. Many were so drawn, in that age when religious commitment was often far removed from any satisfaction of the senses. This side of worship had its appeal for Shorthouse, but his conversion seems to have followed a path more comparable to that of Newman's towards Rome, allowing for the great differences in the men and their situations. It was matter of slowly growing conviction, largely through reading. His wife believed that 'His wide reading, especially of the older English divines, made the idea of an historic and national church peculiarly attractive to him'.<sup>13</sup>

He showed the common dislike of the convert for what he has left; he could describe a man as being 'naturally, somewhat in a fog, being a Dissenter'. Again, towards the end of his life, he was regretting 'the universal tendency towards dissenting and Salvation Army methods [which] makes the advocacy of the old-fashioned, moderate, legal Church of England method of supreme value now'. The same love for the moderate and the legal helped to move him from dissent to the Church of England. In one of his

Quaker essays, after writing admiringly of Milton, he went on:

It is peculiarly characteristic of the age in which Milton lived, and the Puritan sects among which he was brought up, and of those unprofitable and disturbing discussions on things beyond the reach of man's understanding which excited men's minds (and by the attempt to restrain which the Laudian party incurred such a load of obloquy) that Milton, a layman and political tract-writer, seems to feel no diffidence or hesitation in treating of these themes.<sup>14</sup>

This early opinion is something of a prologue to *John Inglesant*, with its admiration of structured Catholicism, whether Roman or Anglican, and its hostility to the pretensions of sectaries. Inglesant's encounter with the Puritan Thorne has the ring of personal experience and may well echo some of Shorthouse's arguments with former associates after his secession. The Puritan is treated sympathetically and allowed to have his say without extreme caricature, but in the end there is the revealing comment: 'There was something extremely pathetic in the sight of the human nature in this man struggling within him beneath the force of his Puritanism' (83).<sup>15</sup>

The Quakers in the book come out rather more attractively. It is true that Inglesant's brother calls them 'an unpleasing sort of people, silent, sullen, and of reserved character' (168), but this is the comment of a fictional creation and echoes the criticism that was usual in early

days of the new sect. The comments in the narration are more sympathetic: Inglesant's reaction to the 'prophesying' of a Quaker woman is far from Johnsonian, for he finds her words strangely in tune with the neo-Platonic mysticism which he has been studying. The Quakers as a whole he thinks 'harmless and sober people, whose blameless lives and the elevated mysticism of their conversation,

commended them to him' (185). The arguments, the fidelity to the new communion and the graciousness towards the best of the old, are reminiscent of Newman's *Loss and Gain*.

That Inglesant represents a good deal of Shorthouse's own private experience is beyond question. His analysis of his hero's character and motives reads like self-revelation; its admission of the desire for system and authority points to his own religious change and is once again strangely reminiscent of Newman:

If I have not failed altogether in representing [Inglesant's] character, it will have been noticed that it was one of those which combine activity of thought with great faculty of reverence and of submission to those powers to which its fancy and taste are subordinated. These natures are enthusiastic, though generally not supposed to be so, and though little sign of it appears in their outward conduct; for the objects of their enthusiasm being generally different from those which attract most men, they are conscious that they have little sympathy to expect in their pursuit of them, and this gives their enthusiasm a reserved and

cautious demeanour. They are not, however, blindly enthusiastic, but are never satisfied till they have found some theory by which they are able to reconcile in their own minds the widest results to which their activity of thought has led them, with the submission and service which it is their delight and choice to pay to such outward systems and authorities as have pleased and attracted their taste (63f).

After he has been indoctrinated by the Jesuit Sancta Clara, Inglesant visits Little Gidding and finds an unprecedented spiritual satisfaction in the small Anglican community which Nicholas Ferrar has founded. Shorthouse himself never went to the site of the old house, but his book helped to stimulate an interest that was already growing. The pattern of Little Gidding, strictly Anglican and loyalist but keeping the ancient offices and honouring some of the conventual principles, was bound to appeal to Anglo-Catholics who sought the disciplined life of prayer but were unable to accept the Roman structure of religious orders, although the Anglican religious life for women and then for men was developing. Shorthouse did not rediscover the story; biographies of Ferrar were already being written and one of the famous polyglot Bibles produced under his direction was on public exhibition a few years after *John Inglesant* was published. Although his knowledge of Little Gidding was literary and derivative, it was convincing to his readers and was, in the opinion of a later authority on the community, 'in the main very accurate'.<sup>16</sup>

The visits to Little Gidding are more than passing episodes. Inglesant's brief reunion with the dying Mary Collet comes at a critical time in his fortunes when his destiny is being decided. The memory of her, and of all his former friends in her community, remains with him in Italy and helps to bring him back to his native Church. Even while he is serving the Jesuits, he carries with him the spirit of that group which combined traditional discipline with the freedom of individual decision. He thus impresses the Duke of Umbria: 'in Inglesant he had, for the first time, met a man who, walking to all appearance in the straitest paths of the Catholic Church, seemed to possess a freedom of spirit greater than the Sectaries themselves could boast' (260).

There is the essential of the attraction which the Church of England held for Shorthouse and for many others: the *via media* to which Pusey and Keble had kept, which Newman had eventually found impossible. Between authority and freedom, Anglicans could believe that they had the best of what extremists falsely polarized. So at last Inglesant turns back to the Church of England and pays it that tribute which is perhaps the most quoted part of the book and which bears quoting again both for what it says and as a specimen of Shorthouse at his best:

The English Church, as established by the law of England, offers the supernatural to all who choose to come. It is like the Divine Being Himself, whose sun shines alike on the evil and on the good. Upon the altars of the Church the divine presence hovers as

surely, to those who believe it, as it does upon the splendid altars of Rome. Thanks to circumstances which the founders of our Church did not contemplate, the way is open; it is barred by no confession, no human priest. Shall we throw this aside? It has been won for us by the death and torture of men like ourselves in bodily frame, infinitely superior to some of us in self-denial and endurance. God knows those who know my life know too well - that I am not worthy to be named with such men; nevertheless, though we cannot endure as they did - at least do not let us needlessly throwaway what they have won. It is not even a question of religious freedom only; it is a question of learning and culture in every form. I am not blind to the peculiar dangers that beset the English Church. I fear that its position, standing, as it does, a mean between two extremes, will engender indifference and sloth; and that its freedom will prevent its preserving a disciplining and organizing power, without which any community will suffer grievous damage; nevertheless, as a Church it is unique: if suffered to drop out of existence, nothing like it can ever take its place (442ff).

That eulogy tells a great deal of what the Oxford Movement meant, and of the tensions which could bring tragedy as well as peace to its followers. It centres on the gift of that movement to the Church of England, which perhaps above all other aspects affected the lives of



individual worshippers. A restoration of the sacramental sense, not as peripheral or subordinated to preaching but as the centre of worship, was the reform that had been most needed in 1833. From that emphasis, with the concomitant claim of a priesthood in the Apostolic Succession, all else may be seen to follow. It helped to lead Shorthouse on his journey away from Quakerism. He does not seem to have required very frequent celebrations, in the manner of the more 'advanced' Puseyites. Rather was it the reverence of administration and reception, the sense of Divine Presence that chiefly moved him. At Little Gidding, the sacrament is celebrated only once a month, but with preparation by each communicant and with great devotion. Inglesant receives the elements and contemplates the figure of Christ in the painted window, 'and stillness and peace unspeakable, and life, and light, and sweetness, filled his mind. He was lost in a sense of rapture, and earth and all that surrounded him faded away' (59). In after times, the memory of that communion 'prevented that craving after the sacrifice of the Mass, which doubtless is one of the strongest of all the motives which lead men to Rome' (62). Nor was this merely historical romanticizing. In a later novel with a contemporary setting, the same mystic union with immanent divinity is felt. The celebration again is only monthly, the communicants are generally few, but:

There was a solemn hush and stillness in the air, and over the whole parish, at that particular moment, as though something mysterious and beyond the common

was taking place. This was especially the case on fine summer Sundays, after the first service was over when, on ordinary days, boys and young men lingered about the churchyard and the village road. On these first Sundays of the month no one was to be seen. At such times there was a stillness and pause, during which Nature herself seemed to hold her breath, and the yew trees, and the apple orchards, and the rows of stately elms, lay passive and silent in the sunlight glow, and seemed to own and to proclaim a Presence, which was of earth and yet divine, to await the tread of the feet of heavenly messengers, the rustle of angelic wings, the gift of heavenly food that nourishes all conditions and ranks alike.<sup>17</sup>

This deep sacramental sense, involving all natural things in the divine purpose, was a tenet of the Tractarians and especially of John Keble. The Anglican service gave him a oneness with Christ which he had never experienced before:

The sacrament and Christ feel to me one and the same. At least, the sacrament seems to me the means by which Christ reveals himself to us, through the medium of that, as I call it 'idea of Christ' - the forces that are Christ, not were.<sup>18</sup>

Yet he retained some of the Quaker independence and could not accept all the Anglican discipline about communion. He wanted to see an open table, to which all should be admitted without conditions; even the agnostic

should participate, to gain more sympathy with religion and a sense of unity with believers. If this seems an excessively liberal position for a Victorian Anglican, we may note that Richard Hooker, who defended the developing Church of England, and was admired and edited by Keble, wrote:

While without any cause we fear to profane Sacraments, we shall not only defeat the purpose of most wholesome laws, but lose or wilfully hazard those souls from whom the likeliest means of full and perfect recovery are by our indiscretion withheld. For neither doth God thus bind us to dive into men's consciences, nor can their fraud and deceit hurt any man but themselves.<sup>19</sup>

Shorthouse shared the belief of those who had received the early Tracts with enthusiasm and then drawn back in face of ritual and Romanist tendencies. It is notable that for years his favourite devotional work was Wilberforce's *Eucharistica*. It was with the voice of an old-fashioned High Churchman that he could say: 'I trace what declension there was in Church life in the eighteenth century to the fact that the conscience of the clergy went with the non-jurors'. He shared the High Church sense of historical continuity, of an institution divinely ordained and offering the means of salvation. He had a particular attachment to the *Christian Year* even in his Quaker youth and he continued to read to his wife the appropriate poem for each Sunday. When he lost the sight of one eye, he said: 'I want

to know the hymns by heart, so that if I lose my left eye, I shall have them still'.<sup>20</sup>

The appeal to the great Caroline days is more Tractarian than Puseyite. 'I thought in *John Inglesant* I wished to indicate the mysticism of the Prayer-Book and the Caroline divines, on the one side safe, on the other infinite'.<sup>21</sup> In castigating Charles Gore for his 1891 Bampton Lectures, Shorthouse warned such innovators who attacked the principle of Establishment that 'A cataclysm such as the world never saw is probably at hand'. The Church of England may be destroyed; 'the Church of Hooker, of Jewel, Nowell, Andrews (*sic*), of Laud, of Sancroft, of Sutton, of Joseph Hall, of Hammond, of Jeremy Taylor, of Leighton, of Patrick, of Comber, and a host more. She may be destroyed but what will take her place! !' <sup>22</sup>

The relation of Shorthouse's Anglicanism to that of the men who initiated the Oxford Movement was shrewdly noticed by the reviewer of *John Inglesant* in the *Saturday Review*, previously quoted:

The book [...] seems to embody in artistic form, views and ideas well known to those who are conversant with what we may call, for want of a better phrase, academic High Churchism. The peculiar religious tone and temper which belonged to the finer and more poetical minds in the Tractarian movement, and which is still noticeable among us both within and without our universities, finds here delicate and beautiful interpretation.

Shorthouse was not much in sympathy with the Puseyite developments after 1845. In his novel *Blanche, Lady Falaise*, he draws a wretched character in Damerle the Puseyite clergyman, who quotes Liddon and Neale, makes much of his missioning among the poor and is proud of accusations of Romanizing. He turns out to be a jilter in the manner of Trollope's Adolphus Crosby and goes completely to the bad through drink. Shorthouse was strong for order and dignity in the Church, but elaborate ritual displeased him. Like the Tractarians, he appealed to what the Prayer Book ordains and approved of a return to older usage rather than innovations. The old parson in *John Inglesant* who performs and justifies certain ceremonies in celebrating the Eucharist remains 'a loyal, honest and zealous advocate, according to his capacity, of the Church of England' (39). In a novel in a contemporary setting, the extent of approval is made more explicit:

The old-fashioned High Church notions of Mr de Foi led him to the observance of many practices, since supposed to be modern innovations, a generation at least before Ritualists, so-called, were heard of. He observed the eastward position at the Holy Communion, he invariably bowed to the altar, and he read morning prayers on Wednesdays, Fridays, and Saints' days.<sup>23</sup>

This and similar comments make Shorthouse interesting not only for himself but as a spokesman for many of his contemporaries. Is the Anglo-Catholic

Movement from the latter part of the nineteenth century to the first decades of the twentieth to be equated wholly with ritualism? Or to put it in another way was Pusey a Puseyite? The Tractarians were not ritualists and did not move far in the use of vestments and ceremonial to accompany their deep reverence for the Eucharist. Pusey did not wholly approve of all that was being done in his name. He said of the advanced ritualists that they were guilty of 'fussiness, pettiness, arbitrariness, pedantry – being Presbyterian towards their bishops and Popes towards their people'.<sup>24</sup> It is only fair to add that the prosecutions under the Public Worship Regulation Act later made him more sympathetic towards those who were labelled with his name.

Shorthouse had no time for the eclecticism of some Anglo-Catholic clergy, or for the assumption of what he regarded as excessive priestly power on the strength of apostolic ordination. He wrote to a cousin in 1899:

I distinguish absolutely between Sacramentalism and Sacerdotalism; they seem to me mutually destructive. So long as the clergy confine themselves to their Sacramental office I look upon them as THE channel of grace. When they depart from this, and act and talk out of their own heads, I pay no more attention to them than I do to laymen.

And in the same year to another correspondent: 'I certainly class the Pseudo-Ritualist (not such as Bishop Cosin) with the Salvation Army, only more so'.<sup>25</sup> Even affectionate treatment of a good priest can be satirical about one



... who had an embroidered altar cloth and wax candles in his church, and services on all Saints' days and holy days, who had all the old pews taken down and replaced with open seats, and who had erected, with the help of his brother, a screen and font of the most 'severe taste'.<sup>26</sup>

Shorthouse shared the fear of concealed Papistry which had accompanied the growth of the Oxford Movement from its first years. The presentation of Laud in *John Inglesant* is, as might be expected, admiring and even adulatory; but it is a fault in him that he is too tolerant of those who are Romanists at heart. Thus Inglesant's father can nominate as chaplain:

A graduate of Oxford, a man who was 'ex animo' a papist, and who only wanted a suitable time to declare himself one. The number of such men was very great, and they were kept in the English Church only by the High Church, doctrines and ceremonies introduced by Archbishop Laud; affording one out of numberless parallels between that age and the present (31). It is admittedly a fictional character, but a sympathetic one who acts as objective narrator of the whole story in *Blanche, Lady Falaise*, who describes her own mother as loving but 'a Parisienne, and a benighted Papist' (p4). That Shorthouse's own views were far from ecumenical is made clear in his letters:

The charge against the Roman Church is not that her doctrines do not contain the germs of truth, but that

having based her system upon the profoundest truths, she has succeeded in making truth itself a lie.

Pure evil, or what we call such, is the stupidest thing in existence (it is only when it allies itself with what is supremely good (as in the Romanist Church) that it becomes really dangerous to the child of God.<sup>27</sup>

It is a pleasant irony that Shorthouse and his wife lived very near the Oratory where Newman passed his late years, and that they were patients of a Roman Catholic doctor who also attended there. After Newman was dead, Shorthouse allowed himself a little patronizing pity:

What agonies poor Newman went through when he found himself and all his exalted ideals, and the whole Romanist Church in England crushed between the more than brutish hoofs of Italian priest-bishops.<sup>28</sup> Yet he more than most men ought to have understood the gain as well as the loss in Newman's change, since he had followed a similar path.

In common with most imaginative writers, Shorthouse had little good to say of the Evangelicals. Their puritanical fear of pleasure and their distrust of the cultured intellect made them seem too much like the seventeenth-century sectaries, and probably too much like the older Quakers of his own experience. He did, however, include a very sympathetic portrait of the great Evangelical Simeon in *Sir Percival*, praising him for his urbanity and culture as well as his personal holiness. In truth, he disliked all extremes which tended to narrowness and exclusion. In a discussion

of comparative levels of churchmanship, he was content to say simply, 'I am a strong sacramentalist'. He approved of some more recent Anglican developments, even though not those in the advanced Puseyite line. Despite his strictures on Gore's Bampton Lectures, he was enthusiastic about parts of *Lux Mundi*. Commenting on Moberley's essay on the Incarnation, he wrote:

It seems to me that the key to the whole mystery of existence lies in these words of the new Oxford school of High Churchmen, not that they have discovered it but that they will work (shall I say) this Christian Platonism into the faith of that wonderful Church of England which is now, in all the world, the only fruit of Christianity (so far as thought is concerned) of any vitality or standing in practical existence.<sup>29</sup>

Here Shorthouse was saying a good deal about his own belief and about the way in which the ideas of the Oxford Movement were beginning to expand and link up with other schools. Of the Platonism here mentioned there is ample evidence. It was a tempting line of thought for the Anglican apologist to counter the Aristotelian tendency of official Roman Catholic dogmatics. Hobbes is shown using it in this way in *John Inglesant*, and Inglesant himself learns Platonism from his early teacher and from Henry More the great Cambridge Platonist. He applies it in his argument with Cardinal Rinuccini: 'The cross of Christ is composed of many other crosses - is the centre, the type, the essence of all crosses'.

He was not drawn to the Broad Churchmen as a whole but admired their leader Frederick Denison Maurice.

Without approving of their liberal theology, he could share their warm enthusiasm for life under God, their essential optimism about human potential and their dislike of extremes in dogmatism. For him, as for them, 'fanaticism' was a dirty word. 'Culture' and 'fanaticism' are polarities which appear with almost wearisome frequency in Shorthouse's views on religion. If the dislike of fanaticism puts him with the Broad Churchmen, the love of culture associates him with the Tractarians. The Oxford Movement, for all its tensions and divergences, was solidly based on respect for intellectual power and on the values of a cultivated life. This was one way in which it soon came to be opposed to the Evangelicalism from which some of its leaders had come and with which its first aims had been partly in agreement.

Shorthouse left no doubt about his purpose in this connection when he wrote *John Inglesant*. The key-words are used in the Preface, and continually in his correspondence with friends and critics about the book. Typical of many is the explicit statement: 'The main interest of my book is to exalt culture against fanaticism of any kind'.<sup>30</sup> Inglesant himself is a model of seventeenth-century culture. He is always well dressed, urbane in manner and conversation, a lover of learning and of the arts. His sincere but balanced Anglicanism is contrasted with the fanaticism of both extremes.

The beauty of religion was never far from Shorthouse's perception. He loves to linger over the description of churches and services in *John Inglesant*. The fallen but penitent Puseyite in *Blanche Lady Falaise*, accuses himself of error in separating religion from the total commitment of living in this world. What annoyed Shorthouse about the Puseyite attitude seems to have been not so much its aestheticism as what he saw, though not really justifiably, as puritanical dedication to religion in isolation from the world. How different is the layman de Brie in another novel:

There could be no doubt that he was a happy man. His disposition was singularly sweet and placid, and he escaped, by an instinctive recoil, everything that was coarse, cruel, or unpleasant. His religion consisted in following the good and the beautiful, and he avoided intuitively the disquieting and difficult aspects both of life and thought. The existence of beauty was to him a safeguard and an asylum from all the attacks of Satan and of doubt. It led him to a Father in Heaven.<sup>31</sup>

He was far from Maurice and his school in politics. He had no patience with socialism or democracy. He did not share the social concern of the Tractarians, which recent scholarship has emphasized, or the growing concern of Anglo-Catholics in his own time which brought such blessings to deprived areas. The sense of order and duly constituted authority was deeply set in his religious allegiance. The mob in *John Inglesant* at the execution of

Charles I has the menacing aspect of the mobs in some novels of the forties and fifties, both those set in England and the early Church stories like *Callista* and *Hypatia*. He was kind though paternalist in running his own business and was friendly enough with his workmen so long as this did not imply 'any nonsense of socialism'.

The attack on Gore was based mainly on the latter's comments about righteous dealing in business and the ethical unsoundness of the profit-motive. The reaction from Shorthouse is interesting as further evidence of his antagonism to the extreme Puseyite wing and also as showing the attitude acceptable to some devout Christians at the end of the nineteenth century.

Surely Mr Gore must know that buying in a cheaper market than that in which we sell is a distinct law of the providence of God, that if a man acts on this principle he will make money, which he may, and often does, expend in building Pusey houses and other good works dear to Mr Gore's heart, and that if he violates this law of God he will come to the workhouse, and what good he will do to Mr Gore or anyone else there, I do not know.<sup>32</sup>

Gore became the first Principal of Pusey House in Oxford when it opened in 1884. Its name would not endear it, or Gore himself, to Shorthouse.

Shorthouse died in 1903 and was buried in the churchyard of his parish church in Edgbaston. Narrow and prejudiced in some ways, he deserves to be remembered as



a stout defender of the Catholic inheritance of Anglicanism. His spiritual journey, and its literary fruit, demonstrate the power of the revitalized Church of England which grew out of the Oxford Movement. It could satisfy the need for historical tradition and a full sacramental life for those who were uncomfortable with some of the ritualist developments which came to be known as Puseyism. The great twelve years that began the Oxford Movement had their direct legacy long after the *Tracts for the Times* had ceased. There were many later in the century who could not personally remember them, but who looked back to them to support the church usages and doctrines which supported their faith. Like all significant movements in history, and perhaps particularly in ecclesiastical history, Anglo-Catholicism has never been monolithic. Its second generation is rightly honoured for its restoration of beauty and dignity in worship, its social generosity, its heroism in persecution. Shorthouse was one of many who looked to the origins, who brought their own limitations into a traditional but evolving Church, to find that the power and the glory were indeed there.

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